

# Rakkasan's COLT Sergeant Tim Andrews— Hero of the JRTC

by Major G. Richard Wise and First Lieutenant Hans-Jorg W. Dochtermann

Every year, artillery battalions deploy to the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), Fort Polk, Louisiana, to execute their missions with the efficiency and professionalism that are the trademarks of the Field Artillery and then re-deploy back to their permanent duty stations. Ask Redlegs who have experienced the JRTC, and they will spin war stories of lost advanced parties, missed link-ups, logistical foul ups and problems with coordination and execution of the fire plan. They will ponder the difficulties created by the “friction of war,” and having learned from their mistakes, anticipate going back to take their revenge on the JRTC’s opposing force (OPFOR). Once in a while, a story is told in which everything did not go wrong. The plan was executed, the commander’s intent achieved and the enemy was defeated. Sometimes the lessons learned were from success, not failure. And at the point of that success is the soldier and, perhaps, even a hero of the battlefield.

If returning home the victor from the JRTC has proven to be the exception, then the *Red Knights*, 3d Battalion, 320th Field Artillery (3-320 FA) in direct support to the 3d Brigade *Rakkasans* of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) out of Fort Campbell, Kentucky, had an exceptional JRTC rotation in April 1998. While in the defense, 3-320 FA was able to destroy several large elements of the OPFOR’s armored offensive, pounding them under massed FA fires, naval surface fire, attack aviation and close air support (CAS), resulting in a resounding victory.

When questioned, the leadership and observer/controllers (O/Cs) attributed the unit’s success to a simple plan and the actions of one well-trained combat observation lasing team (COLT) and the chief of that team, Sergeant Timothy T. Andrews. What could one COLT have done so decisively, so well that its actions decimated an enemy armored task force? Simply put, its job.



L to R: PFC Faison, SGT Andrews and PV2 Hop, COLT 3

COLT 3, Sergeant Andrews and his crew of Private First Class Terrille Faison and Private Second Class Matthew Hop, executed the fire plan and the commander’s intent so well that their position at Dugout 7 proved to be the decisive point on the battlefield. While it’s true that Sergeant Andrew’s quick thinking and initiative were two key factors in determining the outcome of the battle, paramount to the success of 3-320 FA was the adherence to the fire plan and training to doctrine. Specifically, the fire plan ensured that obstacles would be covered with fires, and observer teams would be employed to overwatch them—sticking closely to the guidelines for defensive fire planning laid out in *FM 6-20-50 Tactics, Techniques and Procedures (TTP) for Fire Support for Brigade Operations (Light)*. Target groups were established and adjusted-in for each obstacle, thereby facilitating the massing of fires to slow the enemy’s rapid advance. An area denial artillery munitions (ADAM)/remote anti-armor mine system (RAAMS) minefield was planned to reinforce the obstacle at Dugout 7, triggered by enemy armor moving south of

a designated phase line or by time, based on the enemy’s doctrinal timeline.

Sergeant Andrews’ success began with the top-down fire planning. The brigade fire support coordinator (FSCOORD) gave his guidance in support of the brigade commander’s intent to establish a defense in depth and to emplace obstacles at critical points in the brigade’s sector. The three COLTs were kept under brigade control and assigned to cover the three key obstacles supporting the brigade plan. COLT 3 was to cover Dugout 7, the key chokepoint in the western sector.

The brigade fire support officer (FSO) and the brigade engineer determined that Dugout 7 was also the best place to employ the one 400 x 400 ADAM/RAAMS minefield allocated. COLT 3 was given the mission to: (1) Use its precision lightweight global positioning system receiver (PLGR) to determine the exact location of the obstacles, ensuring accurate covering fires; (2) Adjust-in the ADAM/RAAMS minefield with dual-purpose improved conventional munitions (DPICM); (3) Adjust-in a three-target group, codeword “Cowboy,” to quickly mass fires; and (4)

Select a position to observe the obstacle, minefield and target group. Finally, all aspects of fire support were incorporated into the brigade plan, including mortars, artillery, naval surface fire support, attack aviation and CAS, each having a role in defeating the OPFOR.

The bottom-up refinement process proved to be the key to COLT 3's execution of the plan. Sergeant Andrews knew his team was responsible for refining the plan, based on the conditions it encountered while emplacing and preparing for battle. He began by coordinating in sector with the engineers to PLGR-in the exact grid for the obstacle he was to cover. He established a target for that grid, providing an accurate location to mass mortars and FA fires.

Sergeant Andrews next began the process of determining the best place for the minefield and then adjusting it in. This and adjusting fires on target group Cowboy proved very difficult to execute. The preparation of the defense caused many friendly elements to be moving about the battlefield. Company and platoon elements were conducting reconnaissance and repositioning their defenses to use the terrain to best advantage. This caused several attempts by COLT 3 to adjust-in fires to be cancelled, as clearing fires was difficult with so many elements moving about, risking fratricide.

Efforts to refine the targets literally took hours with constant prodding from the brigade and battalion FSOs to push the process. The friction of war was present everywhere, making simple things difficult. It is to Sergeant Andrews' credit that he doggedly stayed with his mission, finally getting his targets adjusted and preparing his observation post (OP), even as the OPFOR's lead recon elements began to come into sector.

Heroes often display an innate quality known as initiative. Besides choosing an OP so well camouflaged that the OPFORs recon could not locate it, Sergeant Andrews facilitated his own defense. While coordinating with the engineers, he asked for and received six anti-armor mines. He anchored the approach to his flank that the OPFOR would take if they attempted to bypass the minefield with his own anti-armor effort. This initiative was to pay big dividends for COLT 3.

As the OPFOR moved his recon effort into the brigade sector, his dismounted elements passed through Dugout 7, reported the obstacle and continued on. That same element was destroyed by indirect fires while attempting to reduce the next obstacle, proof of the effects of adjusted fires covering obstacles. More importantly, the enemy recon team was then unable to report that an ADAM/RAAMS minefield had just been fired in behind them at Dugout 7. The minefield, triggered by time, was fired early to ensure that it was in place before the armor and mechanized elements of the OPFOR could roll unimpeded through the defense.

As the OPFOR attack progressed, COLT 3 first marked the presence of the OPFOR's advance by announcing "Fire Cowboy!" beginning a rain of indirect fires onto an enemy who was surprised to have encountered a minefield at Dugout 7. Reacting quickly, Sergeant Andrews apprised his command element of the situation, reporting as many as 10 T-62 tanks were being delayed by the ADAM/RAAMS minefield. The numbers of vehicles involved soon showed that the main effort had come west into the brigade sector, and that COLT 3 was positioned perfectly to maintain massed fires as the OPFOR attempted to push disabled vehicles through the minefield in order to breach it.

As Andrews kept adjusting and repeating "Cowboy," the FSCOORD and brigade FSO in the brigade tactical command post (TAC) were coordinating through the air naval gunfire liaison company (ANGLICO) for naval surface fires, CAS in the form of A-10 Thunderbolts through the brigade air liaison officer (ALO), and AH-64 Apache attack helicopters to destroy the armor and mechanized elements in the vicinity of Dugout 7.

Sergeant Andrews was busy too, keeping his team hidden as enemy armor moved in close and keeping up a relentless mass of fires on the enemy's vehicles still searching for a way around the minefield and obstacle bottling them up. The enemy's last T-62 was stopped in the minefield...the one Sergeant Andrews put in to protect the flank of his OP.

When the mission ended, the area around Dugout 7 was lit by the flashing lights of the OPFOR's "killed" vehicles and a hero of the battlefield was hailed.

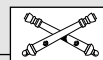
COLT 3 played the key role in destroying 14 of 19 T-62 tanks and 10 of 17 BMPs with more than 100 "casualties" assessed to an OPFOR unaccustomed to defeat on the JRTC battlefield.

The lessons learned by the *Red Knights* are nothing new. The battalion's success in the defense was because of the application of the TTP outlined doctrinally in *FM 6-20-20 TTP for Fire Support at Battalion Task Force and Below* and FM 6-20-50. While there's no doubt that Sergeant Andrew's tactical competence and quick thinking were critical to the outcome of the battle that day, any COLT or forward observation (FO) team that knows its job and takes the initiative can become the hero on its battlefield.

Some will say that luck played a role in Sergeant Andrews' success at the JRTC. Perhaps. However, luck is where preparation meets opportunity. Sergeant Timothy Andrews and COLT 3 are heroes of the battlefield at the JRTC because they were prepared to execute their mission.

When the command environment fosters the aggressiveness and initiative of junior leaders during training, COLT and FO teams become more responsive, providing feedback that allows the FSCOORD at the brigade and higher levels to make realistic, effective fire plans that are refined and executed violently by the FO. And, when it all comes together, it's the stuff from which heroes are made. Just ask Sergeant Andrews and COLT 3.

**Editor's Note:** Sergeant Tim Andrews has PCSed from 3-320 FA at Fort Campbell and is now the FIST Team Chief for Team Charlie with the 1-501 Infantry (Airborne), 172d Infantry Brigade (Separate) at Fort Richardson, Alaska.



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